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Seaflow Statement on the Cosco Busan Bunker Fuel Spill

Vessel Traffic Lanes Threaten National Marine Sanctuaries and State MPAs State and Federal Governments Urged to Address Dangers of Allowing Large Vessels into or near Protected Areas

Sausalito, The Headlands—Marine conservation organization Seaflow is warning that the bunker fuel spill by the Cosco Busan container ship yesterday is a symptom of allowing traffic lanes for large cargo vessels and oil tankers in our National Marine Sanctuaries and State Marine Protected Areas. Immediate action by the state and federal governments to address the heightened risk to the marine environment from oil spills as well as ship strikes and rising levels of ocean noise pollution from large vessels is needed.

“The federal government is running a superhighway through our Yosemite on the sea. Every cargo vessel and oil tanker that enters San Francisco Bay passes right through at least one of our three contiguous National Marine Sanctuaries and through or alongside critical state marine protected areas,” warned Robert Ovetz, Ph.D., executive director of Seaflow.

The federal government has a system of 13 National Marine Sanctuaries, the ocean equivalent to our national park system, which protect the most sensitive and biologically diverse of our national waters. California has 4 along its coast—the Channel Islands, Cordell Bank, Monterey Bay and the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuaries. There are also dozens of state Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) along the California coast.

“The deadly little secret of the Cosco Busan spill is that our National Marine Sanctuaries and state MPAs are being used as on ramps for the global economy. The thousands of vessels that annually enter the Port of Oakland are threatening the very integrity of these invaluable marine habitats and the San Francisco Bay,” Ovetz added.

This year, the California Department of Fish and Game began working to establish a new network of Marine Protected Areas along the North Central California Coast. Two critically important areas in the region, Pt. Reyes National Seashore and Pt. Bonita in the Marin Headlands, which is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, are now contaminated by

the Cosco Busan spill. Shipping lanes run either through or alongside both of these biologically rich areas.

Ovetz highlighted the lesson from yesterday's spill: "The Cosco Busan spill is a wake up call to Department of Fish and Game that any new marine protected areas must be protected from the rising threat of large cargo vessels and oil tankers. The number one goal of the Marine Life Protection Act is to protect the integrity of these areas. That cannot be achieved if we ignore the risk of more Cosco Busan spills, ship strikes, and rising ocean noise pollution."

In addition to oil spills, large cargo vessels and oil tankers — which emit intense low-frequency noise at the same frequency used by baleen whales—are the biggest source of ocean noise pollution in the ocean today. Ocean noise pollution is on the rise locally and globally. In some areas, scientists have documented that underwater noise levels have doubled every decade for the past four decades. Ocean noise pollution has a range of impacts on marine life. At the worst, it can be deadly. Studies show that fish, including commercially important species, are dramatically impacted by noise pollution. Hearing loss, changes in migration and schooling along with serious reduction in catch rates have all been documented.

Large vessel traffic into San Francisco Bay is increasing rapidly. The Port of Oakland, tucked away behind 3 of our National Marine Sanctuaries, is the 4th busiest container port in the U.S. and 20th busiest in the world. According to the federal government, the global commercial vessel fleet including tankers, cargo and other large ocean going ships nearly tripled from about 30,000 vessels in 1950 to more than 85,000 vessels in 1998. According to the US Department of Transportation, the number of large vessels in the global fleet is expected to nearly double in the next 20-30 years.

For more information go to www.seaflow.org